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Teacher Trainees' Self Evaluation during Teaching Practicum

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Abstract

To ensure student empowerment in learning, undergraduates are encouraged to engage in self-evaluation and reflection to relate theory into practice. Self reflection and self evaluation are required for undergraduates during their teaching practicum in schools. This qualitative study reports the findings on self-evaluation reports of four teacher trainees entries as written in their teaching record books throughout the fourteen (14) weeks of teaching practicum at schools. The results of the qualitative analysis shows that the students (a) demonstrated an increasing awareness of their own learning and teaching skills and (b) students demonstrated increase ability to manage issues and problems related to their teaching experience. This lends support to the importance of self reflection in improving self esteem, teaching competencies and management of the teaching climate in classrooms.

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1. Introduction

Self-assessment is notably very important in enhancing students' learning whether they are university under graduates , teacher trainees or students in secondary schools. Klenowski's [1] defines self-assessment as "the evaluation or judgment of 'the worth' of one's performance and the identification of one's strengths and weaknesses with a view to improving one's learning outcomes" This definition stresses on the ameliorative

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potential of self- assessment .Although self-assessment may be indicative of students appraising their work with little interpretative guidance, nevertheless the benefits of self-assessment are more likely to occur when three conditions are met: teacher and students negotiate self-assessment criteria, teacher-student dialogue focuses on evidence for judgments, and self-assessments contribute to a grade (by students alone or in collaboration with teachers).

The term self-assessment is also used in the meta cognition literature to refer to the judgments an individual makes on the basis of self-knowledge [2]. The benefits of self assessment include (1) increasing students' engagement in assessment tasks, (2) adding to the variety in assessment methods, which is a key factor in maintaining student interest and attention, (3) having distinctive features that warrant its use. For example, self-assessment provides information that is not easily determined, such as how much effort students expended in preparing for the task, (4) that self-assessment is a more cost-effective than other techniques,(5) that students learn more when they know that they will share responsibility for the assessment of what they have learned.

Wang and Wang [3] stated that assessment is primarily concerned with offering the learner guidance and feedback. Matsuno [4] maintains that self-assessment is considered as an effective tool which helps students to understand the purpose of the assignment and the assessment criteria [5], and to improve teaching [6,7]. According to Nunan [8], assessment refers to "the tools, techniques, and procedures for collecting and interpreting information about what learners can and cannot do where there is an attempt to train learners systematically in ways of assessing their own learning progress. Kavaliauskiene [9] argues that through self-assessment, learners get an opportunity to think about their own progress and find ways to change adapt or improve it

Self-assessment has been considered as an alternative assessment to gauge students' performances compared to the traditional model whereby the teacher has been the only evaluator. In order to compensate for the limitations of teacher- assessment, alternative assessment including self-assessment has been the focus of attention whereby teacher trainees are instructed to assess their own learning progress and identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

The benefits of self-assessment has been noted in the evaluation literature. Oscarsson [10] gives six rationales for self-assessment procedures. First, he stresses that self-assessment promotes learning. It gives learners training in evaluation which has beneficial consequences for improving their teaching practices. Secondly, it raises the awareness of both students and teachers of perceived levels of abilities. Through self-assessment teacher trainees are encouraged to look at their lesson plans more carefully, and develop evaluative attitudes toward what and how they learn. Thirdly, self-assessment is highly motivating with regard to goal-orientation. Learners gain knowledge of learning goals through reflection. Fourth, the involvement of learners in the assessment process results in the learner's broader perspective within the area of assessment. Fifth, by practicing self-assessment, students take part in their own evaluation, sharing the burden of assessment with their supervisor. Finally, self-assessment may have long-term benefits including the ability to assess the progress which is made.

Teacher trainees need to learn and to be able to critically assess their knowledge. This skill is vital in order to identify topics that need attention, to assess the difficulty of the current problem, and to decide whether the problem is to be changed or whether the student should keep working towards a solution. Self-assessment is a key issue in autonomous learning as it enables learners to set goals and to monitor and evaluate their own learning. Self-assessment requires students to think critically about what they are learning, to identify appropriate standards of performance and to apply them to their own work. Self-assessment encourages students to look to themselves and to other sources to determine what criteria should be used in judging their work rather than being dependent solely on their teachers or other authorities[11,12]). Self assessment is commonly a supplement to supervisors assessment of teacher trainees.

Ross [13] suggested that self-assessment contributes to high student achievement, improved behaviour and provided an explanation for the finding based on social cognition theory. Self-assessment embodies three processes that self-regulating students use to observe and interpret their behaviour. First, students produce self-observations, deliberately focusing on specific aspects of their performance related to their subjective standards of success. Second, students make self-judgments in which they determine how well their general and specific goals were met. Third, self-reaction, interprets the degree of goal achievement that express how satisfied students are with the result of their actions [13]. A few studies have demonstrated that asking students to assess their performance, without further training, contributes to higher self-efficacy, greater intrinsic motivation, and stronger achievement [14].

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Training in self-assessment focuses student attention on particular aspects of their performance by redefining the standards students use to determine whether they were successful and by structuring teacher feedback to reinforce positive reactions to the accurate recognition of successful performance. These influences of self-assessment training increase the likelihood that students will interpret their performance as a mastery experience, the most powerful source of self-efficacy information [16].

Self-assessment contributes to self-efficacy beliefs, i.e., student perceptions of their ability to perform the actions required by similar tasks likely to be encountered in the future. Students who perceive themselves to have been successful on the current task (i.e., who recognize it as a mastery experience) are more likely to believe that they will be successful in the future [16]. Self-assessment training also contributes to self-efficacy through vicarious experience (i.e., classroom discussions of exemplars provide examples of successful experience by students' peers). In addition, the willingness of teachers to share control of assessment constitutes an "inviting message"; i.e., information that the teacher perceives students to be able and responsible, an important source of positive efficacy information [17].

Students with greater confidence in their ability to accomplish the target task are more likely to visualize success than failure. They set higher standards of performance for themselves. Student expectations about future performance also influence effort. There is ample evidence that self-assessment contributes to student achievement [14,15]), particularly if teachers provide direct instruction in how to self-assess. There is also evidence that self-assessment contributes to improved student behaviour [18].

Some data suggest that students prefer self-assessment to assessment by the teacher alone because students said that with self-assessment they had a better understanding of what they were supposed to do because they were involved in setting the criteria for the assessment. Additionally students argued the self-assessment was fairer because it enabled them to include important performance dimensions, such as effort, that would not usually be included in their grade .self-assessment enabled them to communicate information about their performance (e.g., their goals and reasoning) that was not otherwise available to their teacher; 4) self-assessment gave them information they could use to improve their work [19].

Self-assessment encourages students to focus on their attainment of explicit criteria, rather than normative comparisons to other students. As an illustration when self-assessment was extensively used students compare it to his own work and progress [20]. It should be noted however that even though students prefer self-assessment to teacher appraisal alone, such participation poses more work for students. Some describe it as boring [19] and argue that it is unfair to ask them to do the teacher's job. Teachers express concern about the lack of student commitment to the process, arguing that self-assessment will not work if students do not put the required effort into it.

2. Methodology

This is qualitative case study involving four teacher trainees who were undergoing their teaching practicum in two secondary schools. Their teaching practicum was for duration of fourteen weeks. The teachers were required to teach English to Form Two students. They were instructed to teach based upon the lesson plans in the Teacher Record Books. Each lesson must be prepared and written in advance before the lessons started. At the end of the lesson plan was the self-evaluation section. After the completion of each lesson the teacher trainees was required to give feedback on the lesson implemented which included whether the lessons' objectives were acquired and how the students responded to the teacher trainee. The content of the self evaluation was analysed and emerging themes and issues were highlighted.

3. Results

What were the emerging themes from the narratives written by the teacher trainees? The following themes emerged :

- a) Student knowledge ability and understanding
- b) Using Bahasa Malaysia to learn English
- c) Student Engagement on the lesson
- d) Students' lack of self confidence
- e) Students' Motivation to learn
- f) Students dependency on teachers
- g) Students discipline problem
- h) Mentoring teacher's advice
- i) Mentors comment and responses of teacher trainees
- j) Teacher trainees perception on strategies

Let us describe the emerging themes according to the headings suggested:

a) Students Knowledge ability and understanding

The following excerpts depict the challenge faced by teacher trainee:

"Students in 4KM4 have lower English Language Proficiency than what I have expected. Some of them can hardly understand the English I spoke in the class. Thus, the level of activity that I have prepared seems very hard to them. In addition, I have use Malay language quite frequently in the class to enable the students to understand what I wanted to tell them. I have to think of simple language so that they can understand" [R1].

b) Using Bahasa Malaysia to learn English

"Most of the students were able to define the new words they learnt with simple sentences. Remaining few of them could understand the meaning of the words asked by teacher. However, they could not use English language to explain the meaning of the words. They switched to use Malay to define the words. This showed little improvement in their language proficiency as they could understand and use a little of the target language" [R2].

"It is really a big challenge to teach English to them. They kept on asking Malay translation even the teacher has used the simple English Language" [R3].

"Students' progress was very slow. Their language was still at the beginner level. However, most of them willing to try to accomplish the tasks given" [R3].

"In art classes, trying to speak English is nearly impossible. Students from art stream cannot understand English most of the time. They will request you to give instructions in Bahasa Melayu. For example, when I mentioned about "spread the word", they couldn't get the meaning and demanded for a translation. How am I supposed to deal with these classes? Do I have to use grammar translation method which is considered conservative and old? This is because if I use Communicative Language Teaching, which is encouraged by the ministry of education, my students cannot understand what I say most of the time. I tried to speak with a slower speed and it's the simple vocabulary that dazzled them. For example, "do not interrupt". This is definitely going to be a challenge for me" [R4].

"Today's classroom participation was a little bit low, mainly because the grammar terms are quite new to them. At the end of the lesson, students told me they just know what a past participle is. They have no idea that "begun" and "gone" are past participle for "begin" and "go". Seeing that they are interested, I printed out a list of irregular verbs for them to copy down" [R1].

"I tried to reuse the activities from last week but it went badly for this class. Students here do not know about subject verb agreement at all. However, if you use Malay, they will understand in split seconds. I was still trying to use English so that they can learn. Therefore, the students did not seem interested. I guess they did not understand what I explained" [R2].

c) Students' Engagement on the Lesson

"Most of the students in 4KM4 did not give me the correct answers for the worksheet one and two. They are not interested in doing exercise. Once the video ended, the teacher totally lost their concentration. They started to look around" [R1].

"Since the lesson was the last hour of the day, the students seemed quite tired. But, the tasks which were simple and require group work has somehow attracted students to maintain their concentration throughout the lesson. Students were excited when they were asked to construct question and ask their friends to answer it. Group discussion consumed more time than expected. Students' teamwork was improved. They managed to help each other in answering the teacher's question" [R3].

"More than half of the class manage to give their answers to the questions in the worksheet. However, most of the answers given were incorrect. It seemed most of them did not understand what they had read in the comprehension text. At the end of the class, most of them managed to verbally define at least three new words they have learnt in the text" [R4].

d) Students' Lack of Self Confidence

"The other seemed to be very shy to speak out. After the class, one of the students told me that they did not dare to speak out as they think they are not good in speaking. They scared to be laughed by their classmates if commit silly mistake" [R1].

"Students paid attention in the class. They finished their task in time. But, during the presentation, most of them were shy to speak out their group's opinion. Teacher had to keep pushing them to come to the front as some of them were so reluctant to come to the front to do their presentation. The process of pushing and waiting was very time consuming. This has caused the last group lost their time to do their presentation" [R3]

"Most of them can get three questions correctly done in their worksheet. Only a few of them can get more than three questions correctly done. Perhaps the teacher should make the exercise easier in the coming lesson" [R4]

e) Students' Motivation to Learn

"On the other hand, students were extremely excited about the Speed Grammar Competition. They cheered for their friends, and they had fun applying their grammar knowledge. However, the class was extremely noisy due to everyone was shouting the answer" [R1].

"I don't know if I should stop them because it shows to me that they are actually applying something they have learned. I believe the activity at the end had consolidated what they have learned" [R4].

f) Students' Dependency on Teacher

"The students were too dependent on the teacher in the classroom. Teacher has to design some simple activity that enables the students to be independent on their own in their task accomplishment. Most of the students were able to fulfil the second learning objective which is verbally defining two new words learnt in the comprehension text" [R4].

g) Students' Discipline Problem

"Students in this class are harder to control. Half of the students failed their English paper and they could still make jokes to each other. I was quite pissed off when they did not take the exam seriously. They wandered around the classroom peeking their friends' marks. They did not bother to discuss with me" [R1].

"That was when I lost my temper and gave them a hard lecture about their future and career. Some students listened and quieted down; some went to sleep and stopped wandering around" [R2]

"The time was not enough; therefore I did not ask them to check the dictionary and gave them the meaning on the board. The whole lesson was very teacher-centered because students could not give any response. The paper was just too difficult for them as their standard of English is extremely low. I need to simplify the activities with this class next time. One thing I notice here, after I have scolded their misbehaviour, they will quiet down. However, they also lost their mood and interest to study" [R3].

"I cannot plan a full 70-minute lesson plan if I ask students to go to the language lab. They took more than 10 minutes to enter the lab and wasted a lot of time to settle down. Even worse, some of the boys took opportunity to skip my class. The lesson started off very good because those pictures really attracted the students" [R4].

"When I wanted to move on to Development 1, only seven students brought their textbooks. The other all gave me excuses that they have forgotten or they have lost their books. I need to be firm and that's when I wrote down the names, gave them first warning and threatened them I'll send their names to the discipline teacher if they get the third strike. It disappointed me when I heard one student said silently" [R2].

h) Mentoring Teachers' Advice

"One of the English teachers, Puan Chee told me that Kemanusiaan classes or Art Stream are very hard to teach as their English are definitely poor. Therefore, teacher's expectation towards the students should be very low and activities conducted in the class should be simple and interesting. There is no way to force the art students to follow the SPM examination format where they have to read long passages and write long essays. To them, it's all about paragraphs and simple sentences. I am still in shocked and worried about my tomorrows on how to deal with the students. This is definitely something new to me and I will need to find a way on how to make them interested in learning English" [R2]

"The lesson above couldn't be done because I was observing my mentor, Mr. Nizam who taught writing that day. The class was partially active. Some of the students at the back were very reserved and silent. However, they gave responses such as head nod as an indication that they understood what my mentor had said. Mr. Nizam definitely knows when to get serious and when to make jokes to keep the class alive. Students are not afraid to approach him and ask for some explanation to the work that they have done. It also shows that students are concerned about their mistakes" [R4].

i) Mentors Comment and responses of Teacher Trainees

"Today's lesson is very satisfying because I have all my objectives fulfilled. But after reading the comments given by my mentor, I think there are many areas that I need to improve on. I have overlooked the overall students' participation. Not all the students have a chance of speaking for their group presentation. Besides, I would like to improve on my questioning methods next time. I have to ask more questions which are able to stimulate higher thinking skills among the students" [R3]

"I was glad that the students had shown some improvement in their language. Some of them were starting to ask more questions concerning the worksheet. Previously, some of them did not really seem to be attracted by my worksheet. I think they must have made up their mind to learning something from me after seeing all the effort I have put in their class" [R2].

"What am I supposed to do? Realizing it was useless; I wrote their names anyway and continued with the lesson. Since I have the LCD, I typed the exercises and asked them to do. I didn't manage to ask them to read the comprehension "Down's Syndrome". They just needed to complete the synonym exercises" [R4]

j) Teacher Trainees Perception on Strategies

"Grouping the students into three groups is not a good decision. Some of the members of the group rarely contribute to the group discussion at the first classroom activity. Besides, dividing the group into smaller cell group, students' language proficiency has to be taken into consideration while assigning students to their respective groups" [R2]

"Only half of the students manage to provide correct answers for the worksheet. The teacher should have given more guidance to them. During the answer discussion, the teacher should involve whole class as there were only a few students volunteered to give the answer" [R1]

"I think I have to think of a way to encourage the students to be brave enough to use English in my class. I have to create a friendly relationship with the students so that they will feel secure to express their opinions" [R3]

"Perhaps I should try to group them into different groups so that those who were better can help those who were weak. This will reduce my burden to tap into everyone's mind in order to help them. Besides, students who help to guide their friends will have better understanding and mastery of the lesson they learn from teacher" [R4]

"The teacher should encourage the students to use more English in the class" [R2]

"I used a lot of examples in my explanation. The Speed Grammar Competition was a bit of a disaster [R4].

Therefore, the lesson has stretched and I only managed to mark the first and second paragraph in front of the students. When the bell rang, surprisingly, students said they did not want recess and wanted to me to continue marking. They said they can understand better seeing me marking their work. However, I ended the lesson because I must give them recess. I will continue this lesson next week. [R4]

"And today I collected students' homework, only half of them handed in and the others gave all kind of excuses. I kept a record on who has handed in and who has not. And I told those who have not handed in, action will be taken" [R4]

"Students learned new poem today. I was able to give some brief descriptions on the author and we moved on. When I asked about flood in general, students gave me a lot of responses. However, they were struggling to give it in English, in the end they used some Malay words which I translated them to English later. I allowed that because I want to know what they were thinking about flood. I translated their points so that they know how to use it next time. The students were able to recite the poem wonderfully except for some words like "carcasses" and "despair". Other than that, this poem has mostly simple vocabulary. The matching activity also went well. They also gave me 3 hardships faced by the villagers correctly. Overall, objectives were achieved" [R3].

4. Discussion

The verbatim and narratives depicted above provided qualitative data regarding the thoughts and actions of the teacher trainees. It must be remembered that the teacher trainees were out in the real settings of the school after undergoing the micro teaching sessions at the Faculty of Education. The teaching practicum provided the ambience and opportunity for the trainees to blend theory into practice and to assess the dynamics of teaching in reality settings. The teacher trainees presented some issues related to teaching, classroom management and how to manage the teaching effectively. These narratives came from their perspectives as novice teachers who have yet to learn and understand the gap between theory and practice.

5. Implications

Educators training teacher trainees need to delve into the thoughts of the latter through not only the real teaching supervision but also through the eyes of the teacher trainees which can be procured through the self-evaluation reports. Teacher training institutions such as the Faculty of Education can improve the quality of teacher trainees by preparing them to manage the teaching practicum in several areas mentioned by the teacher trainees. It can be notably seen that areas or dimensions that can be improved included improving pedagogical approaches to teaching English as a Second Language (b) improving students cognitive ability through speaking and writing and using multiple intelligences approach (c) increasing students discipline and engagement on the task (d) improving time management skills (e) engaging the teacher mentors in schools by having collaborative dialogues on the trainees self-evaluation and (f) by empowering the students in class by giving them a more active role in learning. Supervisors from the universities need to address the issues and problems stated by the teacher trainees and take concrete action with the Faculty to overcome such issues. Thus it can be further recommended that the faculty should collaborate more effectively with the schools to enhance the quality of training of teacher trainees.

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